

Limits of teachers' consciousness about processes of production and reduction of bullying

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Abstract: Based on the Critical Theory of Society, we analyzed seventeen interviews with teachers of five public schools from the city of São Paulo regarding the causes of bullying and what should be done to reduce it. We identified three categories of answers: those that express critical consciousness of its construction and reduction; those that indicate engagement regarding its combat, but restricted consciousness of its causes; and those that present limited consciousness in both cases. Since the weakened consciousness stood out in most cases, we concluded that amplifying actions intended to provide conceptual formation could strengthen it more than professionals who confront this form of violence, whether through direct interventions, through further research on the subject, or through the proposal of public policies.

Keywords: Critical Theory, bullying, consciousness, teachers, school.

Introduction

In a prominent essay from 1959, the Frankfurt School thinker Theodor W. Adorno mentioned the cultural formation crisis, which had been found by him as being an important part of the psychosocial conditions that favored the rise of Nazi Fascism, to argue that its necessary vanquishment would not be possible without a precise diagnostic of the factors that produced it, or of the subsequent development of a critical consciousness of the extent of its destructive impact. According to him, although it appears mainly in the educational scope, this regressive tendency could expand and install into the social totality; it would not end in the limitations presented by the institutions and pedagogic methods, reaching the core of the process of the individuals' psychic and cultural formation.

More than five decades after the analysis elaborated by Adorno (1959/1986), we face situations that are potentially more destructive than the cultural formation crisis; among these, one stresses the increase in school violence and the appearance of new forms of hostility that, at the same time, are slightly spontaneous and strongly characterized by the great potential of emotional mobilization. Even if the threat of repeating the Nazi Fascist barbarism is not in question, the explicit growth of the violence in the formerly safeguarded aspects of social life alerts us to the limits of capitalist society's typical

democracy, which produces what is anti-democratic from its own formal institutions. Brazilian schools have not only been failing to assure the critical appropriation of culture, but these have been the scenario for the propagation of forms of violence harmful to its cultivation.

Among the violent expressions that ruin the schools, bullying stands out due to the age group that it affects – childhood and adolescence – in which better education could have positive influence. Bullying has characteristics that, due to its similarity with the psychic devices activated by Fascism, arouse great social concern. Similar to the pseudo formation to which it intrinsically interrelates, it is derived from a complex constellation of factors, disposed irregularly on the several scopes of the lives of the aggressors, victims and other participants of several daily situations related to the ways of intimidation, hostility and limitation that constitute it. We intend to analyze the importance of the consciousness of some of the factors that determinate it; mainly, the school institution, social totality and individual psychic dimension.

In a similar way to our effort, during his analysis of psychological and social factors related to bullying, Crochik (2012) also emphasized the elements of these three dimensions. He analyzed the double hierarchy present at school – the one that is related to intellectual performance and the other that is based on physical strength –, the authoritarian personality and the variations of the autonomy before authority. According to what we understood, these factors are expressions of spheres that are commonly neglected when analyzing school violence and, without which, the explanations on the causes of bullying

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may reduce it to individual psychological motivations or to a mechanical effect of problems related to the family psychodynamics and community disaggregation.

We understand that bullying is not a reflection of psychological problems typical of the pedagogic scope, but it includes institutional aspects related to the school and the set of organizations that regulate social life, psychodynamic elements present in familiar and group relations, and the social totality that is effected in each particular element that constitutes it, exercising, with this, strong pressure on the individuals and social institutions developed under its influence. For these reasons, one can say that confronting this new relationship regulator established by children and adolescents in the school context represents a great challenge for society as a whole. In this sense, research on its psychosocial dimension represents the hope and the risk of criticism directed to the individual. The risk is of ideological distortion, of blaming the victims for the misfortunes to which they were submitted, thus neglecting the different levels of aggression performed by the hierarchical society, whereas the hope is that the denunciation of the individual's weakness, currently represented by the relapse in the barbarism effected by bullying – which, although its specificity in times of formal democracy, also represents, continuity in relation to the expressions of barbarism effected by the totalitarianism that devastated Europe in the first half of the 20th century –, may evoke a need for reflection without which the individuality is not sustained.

Before the need for understanding the contradictory propagation of school violence, the emphasis on the process of the formation of the individual is stressed as it allows us to enter the pseudo-cultural net. Distinct from the restrictive references to the individual that elevate him/her to the univocal explicative category, in general, concluding with his/her accountability, the turn to the subject proposed by Adorno (1967/2000c), on which we based for this analysis, comprises the acknowledgment of the socially imposed limits to the constitution of individuality. In these terms, the concept of individual formulated by Horkheimer and Adorno (1956/1978) may help us to establish bullying as a type of violence that, besides its already well described characteristics by the specialized literature (Fante, 2011; Plan, 2010)¹, affects the core of the process of individual formation, constituting a type of limitation that impedes the distinction indispensable to the development of the spiritual dispositions needed for the pacifist coexistence with the differentiated one (Adorno, 1969/1995b) and for exercising a basic level of autonomy without which democracy is not possible. On the one hand, this form of intentional

and systematic aggression, performed by children and youths to their peers, is already indicative of the premature psychic inscription of social destructiveness; on the other hand, its immediate effect is the limitation of the necessary expression of essential human characteristics, such as fragility, fear and difference. Composed by regressive psychic elements, but also by contradictory institutional contexts and by social mediation, bullying comprises individual psychic processes as aggression, apathy and cruelty; processes linked to institutions and organizations in which both victims and aggressors are inserted and by which they gain their psychic and cultural formation, besides their psychic and material survival; and, mainly, complex social processes in which the social determination is effected in concrete situations of demand in order to adapt to hierarchical relationships, threat of social exclusion and privation of the civilization benefits, and the adjustment to standards of conduct mediated by social totality, which, together, determine both the limitations and the potentiality of coexistence without aggression.

In an aphorism written in 1935, Adorno (1951/1993) declared, “In fascism, the nightmare of [Adorno's] childhood has come true” (p. 169). With this shocking affirmation, he revealed the historical character of the phenomenon that nowadays is called bullying, as well as its incidence on an environment that is apparently very distinct from what is typical at the schools analyzed. The memory of the aggression witnessed in his childhood, performed by five schoolmates who beat another one of their peers who was considered a traitor to the class for having complained to the teacher, led him to affirm: “The outbreak of the Third Reich did indeed surprise my political judgment, yet not my fearful premonitions” (p. 169). This episode provides us with two important characteristics of bullying: despite the socioeconomic variations of the distinct environments, the destructive tendencies present in social totality manifest themselves in everyday relationships, constituting a cultural condition that tends to be inscribed in the experience of each one as an indestructible mark; the systematic intimidation that is typical of bullying has a connection with other phenomena already observed in mankind's history, but its affinity with Fascism stands out. Certainly, the analysis of neither this nor other forms of violence can be dissociated either from the critic of the supremacy of domination present in the contradictory process of clarification (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1985), which, besides having represented the possibility of realization of human dignity, also constituted the basis for the several forms of subjugation observed throughout history, or from the consciousness that any attempt to justify violence as natural tends to be ideological. We envision a concept of *bullying* that considers the identity between the widespread cases of aggression and constraint, so frequent in the day-to-day school life of Brazilian children and youths, and the current phase of deterioration of the human relationships under the determination of late capitalism. Crochik et al. (2014),

¹ Fante (2011) refers to an already universally established definition of bullying: “it is a set of aggressive, intentional and repetitive attitudes that occur with no evident motivation, adopted by one or more students against other(s), causing pain, distress and suffering. Insults, intimidations, cruel nicknames, mockeries that hurts profoundly, unfair accusations, actions of groups are hostile, mock and afflict other students' lives, leading them to exclusion, besides the physical and material harm, are some of the manifestations of bullying”. (p. 28-29).

also concerned about this, considered that neglecting social determination may result in ideological distortion: “Insofar as it dissociates the particular from the whole to which it relates dialectically, the division between school and society reproduces the violence of totality, tending to make social determination natural” (p. 115).

Nowadays, social relationships, mainly in the organizations’ core, are marked by prejudice, stereotypes and impediments to everyday communication and coexistence, characterizing the reduction of the possibility of having experiences. As school relationships also present those traces, the study on how this form of regression interferes with how the school’s objectives become central. If, as defined by the education public policies in force in Brazil, the school aims to produce autonomous subjects, one cannot ignore that the consciousness sphere is fundamental to understanding the contradictions that it currently presents. It is only with consciousness that it will be possible to realize and face the constant social stimulation to violence and coldness that is directly expressed in bullying and disseminated in social relationships in general. Adorno (1967/2000d) argued that thinking is equivalent to performing intellectual experiences; from this, one understands that the limitation provoked by bullying, as it hinders the experience, also affects the thought sphere, which is essential to the development of autonomy.

In agreement with Adorno’s analysis (1962/2000a) on the relationship between the intellectual experience and the capacity of reflection regarding the reality in which one is inserted, the delimitation of consciousness as an object of analysis implies acknowledging its fundamental importance to the education of students and verifying its possession by teachers; which, according to him, is still possible, despite the economic pressure on most: “. . . it is not so unbearable in order to prevent self-consciousness and self-reflection of the object. . .”(p. 72). Therefore, interested in verifying the condition of consciousness in the school education process and, mainly, its potential resistance to bullying, we elected, as important elements for the analysis of the selected material, the processes of consciousness and self-consciousness – critical consciousness expressions –, as well as their relationship with the subsequent possibility of proposing and effecting confrontation actions. The teachers’ consciousness in relation to the implicate factors, including in relation to institutional and social dimensions, in the construction and reduction of this form of school violence, stands out as being an important link between the objective perception of the phenomenon and the proposition of effective measurements to eradicate it.

In a empiric study on the perception and intervention of teachers in relation to bullying in classroom, Silva et al. (2013) concluded that many teachers “present a fragmented knowledge in relation to the definition of bullying, as well as its main characteristics” (p. 134) and, due to this, they confused it with typical games of the age group or with sporadic aggression. Because of the weak conceptual elaboration, the teachers’ posture in relation to bullying is

also impaired, as they adopt very restricted measurements, in general, that are circumscribed in the specific context in which they occurred, or refer it to the school management, which, when it does not have an institutional confrontation to this form of violence, ends up taking equally limited measures. The conclusions reached by the authors strengthen our hypothesis as they indicate that the level of bullying comprehension, of the factors implicated in its construction and in its ways of expression, affects the quality of the interventions performed.

Essential representatives of this institution, whose objective is clearly defended as the cultural formation of children and youths, are the teachers – who also participate in the violent social process that emerges in day-to-day school life. However, the specificities of this connection are not always treated with the necessary clarity, since they are object of taboos that obscure them; in many cases, the teachers are perceived in a distorted way by students, community and themselves. When analyzing the taboos that hang over teaching, Adorno (1965/2000b) discussed “the collective sedimentation of representations” that are maintained “as psychological and social prejudices, which, in turn, retroact over reality and become real forces” (p. 98). From this analysis, one emphasizes three important aspects of the pedagogic relationship: the emotional intensity of the teacher-student contact may provide experience of conflicts that involve processes of identification and frustration, including processes that are relevant to the formation of intrapsychic instances and to the consolidation of psychic ideals, which are essential moments for personality development and for individuality acquisition; the risk of there being authoritarian or excessively permissive conduct manifested by teachers may endanger the school’s objective, since the possibilities of cultural formation have become more and more sparse in contexts marked mostly by hostile relationships; and the risk of consummating a tendency that transforms teachers into knowledge sellers, restricting their spontaneous human contact with the students. The extent of proper coldness of the mercantile relationships to the field of education brings with it the false impression that the technical operability is equivalent to the objectivity, what may strengthen the subjectivity denial. The teachers stand out for their relevance in children’s and youths’ education, because, despite the decline of authority within the family and school, they are still perceived as models, so that their level of consciousness and their subsequent capacity of self-reflection are maintained as essential mediations for the relationship that children and youths establish with them to surpass the level of blind identification and promote the strengthening of rationality. Imprisoned in the formal relationship with the school and in the organizational bureaucracy that permeates all social institutions, the youths cannot resist to what Adorno (1959/1986) denominated as “ubiquity of the alienated spirit”; they remain without what would be essential to constitute subjectivity: the experience and the

concept. Nevertheless, as the teachers do not realize their importance in education, they also remain subordinated to the precepts of pseudo formation.

The study of Lobato and Placco (2007) on the conceptions of teachers regarding school violence also corroborates our reasoning. It indicates that violence manifested at school includes violence to which the school is the protagonist and that, sometimes, is subtly manifested in the bureaucratic relationship that teachers have with their students. For them, violence prevention at school depends on the teachers' ability to identify it; it depends on them acknowledging the limits imposed on their profession. Although we distinctly understand that teachers cannot be made responsible for the violence which is reproduced in relation to the student, as it should be attributed to the educational system that does not allow them to exercise their profession with autonomy, their argumentation meets ours in relation to the infiltration of violence into school context and to the verification that there are several damages that arise from the bureaucracy that exists in the teaching profession, including the impoverishment of consciousness.

Only the clear consciousness that they are both representatives and victims of the contradictions of the school institution and the oppressive society, which determine their operating scope, would allow them to develop another level of comprehension in regards to school violence, including the perception of their portion of responsibility in relation to the reproduction of social and institutional violence, as well as the teachers' potential to produce resistance to its propagation. In relation to bullying, it is essential that the teachers consider this fundamental element of education, consciousness, because it is only with them being conscious of their role that they will be allowed to understand, without subterfuge, the production of school violence.

There are several factors that limit consciousness, mainly when the production and the reproduction of the several forms of violence at school are in question; thus, the acknowledgment of the importance of teachers confronting bullying and awareness produced at school, as self-consciousness of its contradictions and as the production of social consciousness, are essential for the school to fulfill its role against such barbarism. Thus, it would be directly engaged with developing the capacity to self-reflect, allowing the resistance to barbarism (Adorno, 1965/2000b) that sometimes presents itself as a bad prank.

For the purpose of this article, we aimed to verify if the teachers questioned about bullying presented a consciousness of how the school participates in the reproduction of this barbarism and, according to the potential indicated here, of its importance for unbarbarism. It is when the school acquires consciousness of the factors that contribute for the production of bullying, including the factors directly linked to the school institution, that it is possible for it to perform its function of unbarbarizing. In this sense, the delimitation of the perception that

the teachers have of themselves, of their implication in the production and the reduction of bullying and of their importance in regards to cultural formation in the contradictory socioeconomic context, is a valuable empiric element for one to evaluate the effective potential of confrontation. For this, we tried to capture such aspects from considerations, reflections and comments from teachers regarding the causes of bullying and the actions that, according to them, may be performed to reduce it. Based on the aforementioned, our objective was to analyze the consciousness manifested by the public school teachers from the city of São Paulo in terms of the processes of bullying construction and reduction, and to analyze the elements of consciousness present in such considerations that were individually elaborated and manifested in the answers to the questions that were presented to them. Together, the assessed considerations revealed indications of the presence, lack or fragility of consciousness.

We assumed as a hypothesis that a sufficiently consolidated, objectified consciousness in teachers' considerations, about the processes of bullying construction and reduction, would assure substantiality to the analysis and would provide better consistence to the proposal of confronting and reducing bullying, depending on more elaborated and critical considerations regarding the entanglement between individual, institutional and social dimensions. It would be a critical consciousness about the importance and limits of the confrontation actions to one form of violence that is based on socially consolidated tendencies, and it cannot be overcome only from itself: bullying is an expression of a contradictory and highly hierarchic society, which demands adjustment to cold and competitive relationships, and it will only be effectively suppressed through radical transformation of the objective conditions that engender it.

Method

Included in the study were seventeen teachers, aged 24-60 years – all of whom signed the Informed Consent Form² that aimed at assuring them anonymity –; three Portuguese, two teaching Mathematics, one the Sciences, five the Arts and six Physical Education, from four public municipal schools and from one public state school, all involved in basic education and located in the city of São Paulo. Three of these are located in the North of the city and the other two in the West. Despite the great variation of the socioeconomic patterns, the Human Development Index of the districts where these schools are located varied from 0.65 to 0.92, that is, from medium-high to high (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada & Fundação João Pinheiro, 2014). We chose to

² The project that includes the gathered data – Violence in school: discrimination, bullying, and responsibility – had the Research Protocol n. 066-2011 approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of PUC-SP on 03/28/2011.

collect our sample data in public schools only in order to assure a more homogeneous sample; certainly it would be desirable that new research projects could complement the data here presented with the data obtained from private schools, confronting them and verifying their specificities.

The two questions analyzed in this article – “why does bullying occur?” and “what is necessary to combat it?” – were part of a more extensive research project, with other questions and varied techniques. The interviews were performed at the schools, with each teacher individually. As one chose not to capture them on tape, all records were made through notes by the interviewer; thereby, the material collected and analyzed was also considered based on the appropriation of the interviewer, and one sought to obtain objectivity without denying the distance between subject and object. Among the theoretical elements that inspired us for this method delineation, one emphasizes the consideration made by Adorno (1951/1993) on the inversion of the subjective and objective concepts, established by positivist philosophy. As he argued, the judgments that dismiss the stipulated knowledge and are in direct relation with the object, thus, the ones that are effectively objective, when understood in consonance with the positivism and with the Cultural Industry – “whose objectivity is calculated by the subjects that organize” (p. 60) – are disqualified as too subjective. According to what we have learned and tried to apply with the method of this research, the records elaborated from the notes of the researchers are an adequate procedure for confronting the study object, allowing us to envision, through reflection caused by the researchers’ indispensable impressions, what is effectively objective.

Analysis and data discussion

We concentrated the analysis on the content of the teachers’ answers, in their considerations and reflections on the themes presented, thereby verifying the elements that showed critical consciousness of the production of bullying and possibilities for intervention in situations in which it occurs. We understand that, though one has not formulated questions that circumscribed the perception or the consciousness as categories about which the subjects should manifest themselves directly, the questions presented allowed them to elaborate their answers with the elements that they thought more relevant, with there being, in all cases, the possibility to manifest the perception that they have of bullying and their participation in the several levels of its construction and confrontation. We expected that the most consistent answers analyzed bullying more critically, considering individual, institutional and social factors, without neglecting the teachers’ implication that, besides being part of this same society whose organization favors a number of forms of aggression, are also representatives and direct protagonists of the educational institutions in which they are inserted and from which they formulated their respective answers.

We developed three categories through which we intend that the analysis and the exposition of the data constitute a single process, composed by the synthetic organization of the great volume of empiric material collected and subsequent theoretical interpretation:

- 1st – answers that express consciousness about bullying production and reproduction;
- 2nd – answers that show engagement from teachers in relation to combating bullying, but with limited consciousness of its causes;
- 3rd – answers that did not present traces of consciousness about bullying production and confrontation.

By categorizing the answers, we tried to understand the contradictory condition of consciousness in a contemporary social process, considering its objective impairment and the possibilities that it affirms itself as a resistance in the face of regressive tendencies determined by social totality. We expect that, in this way, this complex cognitive and political-social process is not reduced under the supposition that operational elements would be the only ones that would enable its factual and immediate description (Antunes & Zuin, 2008); we intended that our reflection allows consideration regarding how the answers elaborated to the questions presented relate to the conceptions exposed in the introduction, allowing us to know its respective range and limits (Crochik, 2012; Crochik et al. 2014).

Answers that express consciousness of construction and reduction of bullying

Were included in this first category: the Mathematics teacher from School E, Arts teacher from School B and Portuguese teacher from School C. The considerations expressed therein confirmed our hypothesis that the ample and critical understanding on the construction of this form of school violence was always presented while accompanied by well-structured proposals, destined to its reduction; they took into account the role and the participation of the teachers, leading to the accountability of the teachers, family and individual. It is worth observing that the social determination of bullying founded the understanding that is associated to the violence that arises from the society structure and is materialized into the social relationships that are encouraged by it. Such elaborations articulate a considerable set of aspects and dimensions regarding the construction of bullying, comprising fundamental elements for its critical comprehension, as well as the possibilities of elaborating proposals and engaging in interventions that are opposed to it.

In the answers given by Mathematics and Portuguese teachers’, the relationship between bullying and the

characteristic values of social totality, such as selfishness and individualism, stands out. According to what they suggested, such values are reproduced in several instances and institutions and are propagated both by the family, through violent and prejudiced jokes, and by the school, through daily physical and emotional violence. The answers also emphasized that this set of ideas appears to be a social tendency originating from the society organization itself: "the system imposes itself". Being an omnipresent mediation in the youths' individual history in the cultural formation process, the threat destined to the adaptation exigency corroborates the reproduction of social values in which humankind does not recognize itself. In this sense, it reveals the impoverishment of the subjects that is resultant from the contradictory relationship with the oppressive social totality (Adorno, 1955/2004).

They consider the school context as a constitutive factor of bullying, and admit that certain teachers' practices could reinforce it. According to what they indicated, this is verified in situations in which the teachers themselves use nicknames to talk about students, which, according to the Mathematics and Art teachers, deny the identity of the other. When developing this type of consideration, in which they expressed concern about how they participate in the process, they demonstrated to be self-consciousness of their role before the particularities of teaching and the professional challenges. They demonstrated a realization of their own implication in the events of the school and also expressed social consciousness regarding the interdependence between the individual and society; they presented consciousness of the need to demand a position of resistance from themselves to the hostile relations, reporting that an acceptance of violence as if it were a simple joke or daily banality, is a way to reaffirm it.

Other aspect indicated in these answers was that a student who frequently practices this form of violence wants to impose himself/herself, resulting in a poor school performance, which, according to what we understood, is related to the double school hierarchy: the one that is structured officially from the intellectual performance and other that is expressed as non-official hierarchy, based on the use of physical force (Adorno, 1965/2000b). In this respect, while observing the implicit criticism in the refusal of many students to accept the tough educational process, represented by the teacher figure, Adorno stressed the confluence between the educational process failure in contemporary culture and the strengthening of the double hierarchy, which was widely explored using destructive forces by Fascism. The definition of bullying adopted by the specialized literature (Fante, 2011, Plan, 2010) indicates that it is a phenomenon marked by evident disparity, which may be manifested, among other means, in the recourse to the difference in individual physical force for purposes of coercion, in the use of astuteness to humiliate and dominate the most fragile, or as group connection and organization that aggressively delimit the scopes of the in-group and the out-group. The answers

from this category emphasized as social causes of bullying the facilitation and the potentiation of the violence resulting from how the students organize themselves into groups. In addition, they mentioned that the recourse to violence is related to the fragility of the self, which leads to psychic regression, as discussed by Adorno (1955/2004) as a socially determined process.

In the considerations regarding confronting this form of violence, reflection on the implication of the teacher and the school management was recurrent. They manifested concern on the development of a systematic and broad work, directed to its causes. One of the teachers mentioned that positive results could be obtained through a non-waiver: ". . . it is necessary to be persistent; to be continuous". Actions such as constant dialogs, individual talks, campaigns, assemblies and other policies of confrontation were mentioned as examples for this set of proposals. They emphasized the importance of favorable actions to reflection and consciousness and criticized interventions that impose vertical values and those that just "talk, talk, talk..." This critical posture was also observed in the analysis by the Portuguese teacher that, when relating bullying to the reproduction of interpersonal ways of relationship characterized by intense hostility, concluded that "with good relationships, bullying would not exist". In this perspective, she related the bullying incidence to the quality of interpersonal relationships, which corresponds to the Adorno's understanding (1959/1986) of the regressive potential of pseudo formation socialization.

The need to establishing an institutional atmosphere contrary to the propagation of barbarism (Adorno, 1967/2000c; 1965/2000b) was also emphasized in these answers, mainly in the indication that one cannot give up the proposal that the school should be a space to create citizens. The Art teacher from school B stressed that the teachers need to be conscious of their power to "break the boy's life in the middle", and then think about the violent relationships and the institutional dynamics installed: even sustained by social determination, bullying should and must be confronted by the school. By affirming that the teachers cannot face bullying as if it were a normal behavior, he demonstrated concern regarding the need to avoid the violence propagating. He criticized the merely formal and bureaucratic use of record books, dispatching of notes to parents and suspensions. His consciousness also manifested itself in the understanding that, aside from being contrary to student exclusion, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the teacher.

The way that each interviewee could include himself/herself or the faculty from which he/she is a representative in those proposals and interventions directed towards confronting and reducing bullying – as a part of the force necessary to affect them – helps us distinguish, among the interviewees' considerations, those that presented consciousness regarding the importance of the teacher in the school routine and others that led him/her to an alienated insertion besides from the educational

process. In the case of the answers classified into this first category, we verified that there were strong examples of this importance being acknowledged. Even if any of them performed the critical consciousness in full, jointly they presented important indications of consciousness of the construction and causes of this phenomenon; they did not reduce it to an isolated aspect, unlinked to the institutional scope or the social and historic context.

Answers that showed engagement in relation to the combat to bullying, but limited consciousness of its causes

The answers classified into this category express perspectives of understanding bullying characterized by the lack of critical appreciation of the several factors that constitute it; they represent elaborations that explained its causes through accurate aspects that reduce it to the effect of its direct determination.

The character apparently contradictory of this category, composed of 11 out of 17 interviews, stood out as central data for our discussion as it comprises the limitation of consciousness of the construction of bullying in contrast to the participation in accurate interventions directed to its confrontation. The fact that it is a characterized category, precisely due to its lack of consciousness, generated great difficulty for us in terms of exposing what is in common in the answers that express, jointly, a fragmented understanding of the causes of bullying; positions and appreciations that blame specific causes – actors, situations and institutions – singly. For instance, the family, the community or the individual psychic dispositions are mentioned without the right articulation with more diffuse dimensions such as everyday life, culture or social totality. This characteristic keeps them in this category because it reduces the understanding of what constructs bullying to only be part of what determines it, without relating it to other equally important factors, not only in regards to the correct understanding of its causes, but, mainly, of what could be done to effectively reduce it.

Even if the accurate actions, centered in a partial understanding of bullying, may constitute important resources for its confrontation, without the consciousness that the eradication of the many forms of violence extrapolates the scope of its immediate manifestation, it will be difficult for them to be able to constitute progress in the fight for its reduction. It is necessary to consider that there is no way to overcome bullying without simultaneously occurring substantial transformations on the social structure that stimulates it as a type of existential *ethos*: the competitiveness, the virility and group cohesion, valorization of strength etc. When it is about social processes in which society itself became the main propelling force of violence, producing it from its own structure, it is indispensable that interventions directed to its confrontation express a proper level of self-consciousness, because it shall only allow, through

the confrontation between the production and the control of violence, dealing with the theme beyond a repressive perspective, based on the interest caused by social domination. However, in no interview of this category did the teachers recognize, sufficiently, the school as one of the elements responsible for the production of this form of violence.

The Physical Education and Sciences teachers from school A did not present great deal of consistent considerations regarding the causes of bullying, mainly because they attributed great importance to the students' immaturity; they indicated that the production of bullying is related to a precarious psychological formation, that is manifested, for example, into the difficulty of coexisting with the different, into the immaturity and into the insecurity regarding school life. The Physical Education teacher's answer was emblematic "it's difficult to coexist with the different, with everything that is not similar to my own identity". Similarly, the Science teacher also indicated that the aggressors present "great insecurity" and seek, due to this "constitutional" motive of their personality, to affirm their superiority through provocations on those supposed to be more fragile. In spite of being important, these elements configure a partial and allegedly univocal explanation; they indicate a proper perception of bullying to deterministic conceptions. Insofar as they did not acknowledge that the fragility of the self is related to contradictory social processes, it is not possible to confront it, which also applies to the students on whom it is imputed, becoming an armored element and, due to that, favorable to the intensification of violence.

In this sense, the Art teacher from the same school delimited the introversion, the fear and the fragility of the student victims of this violence as causes of bullying: "some students are quiet, closed, introverted and do not defend themselves from the aggressors". He attributes them to the victims as explicative elements disjointed from the social context that produces them, as well as the need for submitting the most fragile, justifying the social hierarchy through psychological contents. One can say that he was correct by indicating the relationship between psychological dispositions and bullying, but he was wrong by not relating them to social life. If, according to what was indicated by Adorno (1967/2000c), fear and fragility are objectives and arise from existence conditions, it is necessary for them to be expressed so that their elaboration occurs. This elaboration, however, demands certain consciousness of the limits imposed by social life; it demands consciousness of insecurity of those who need to attack to achieve self-affirmation and, also, of the fragility of those who are not able to react because they are hounded and whose defense mechanisms were weakened by the adaptive pressures.

Despite the limitations identified, interesting intervention proposals were mentioned – to promote talks, activities and campaigns; to call parents; to work values with the students and valorize good relationships; to open

proper channels so that problems can be communicated and stimulate student associations –, indicating there are collective and individual confrontation strategies in which many teachers participate, even though, in many cases, these strategies are bureaucratically conducted by the school management or supported by the engagement of a small group of teachers who are more sensitive to the cause, aggregating, thus, participants mobilized by very diverse purposes. If considered separately, the diverse forms of intervention presented by the teachers from this category, especially in these three interviews, tend to express little reasoned interests in consistent theoretical conceptions or well consolidated attitudes against the violence that arises from society. It is possible that their adhesion to anti-violence programs comprehends motivations extraneous to consciousness: from the inconsiderate reproduction of the moral rejection to violence to the conventionalist adhesion to the scholar policy. Nevertheless, a higher frequency of teachers casually involved in confrontation situations to bullying than those who showed themselves conscious of the complex factors that produce it perhaps may be converted into motivation for knowledge and reflection about it, which constitutes new possibilities for amplification of consciousness and for a contraposition to the blind action.

The Art and Mathematics teachers from School E admitted that bullying is produced by psychosocial factors, but they seem to have abstracted them from the social context that produced them. According to the Art teacher, prejudice is the “great evil responsible for insecurity and fear”, as well as for “the non-acknowledgment of the positive side of difference”. This imprecise reference to prejudice and otherness comprehends an important moment for perception of bullying, however, the perceptive process remains incomplete: it is replaced by an amalgam of partial impressions and non-elaborated projections. One emphasizes, in the considerations presented by these teachers, the consideration that these elements configure impassable obstacles, but that could be confronted through the imposed contact with the different. Thus, it leads to the unthinking integration that, when ignoring the conflicts, it ends up increasing the prejudice that already exists, and may further aggravate the difficulties of relationships. An example of this is the Mathematics teacher’s observation that the attacking students “tease for teasing”.

When mentioning the proposals of confrontation to bullying, these two teachers revealed important similarities: they indicated the need to talk to the students, taking the conflictive situations to the principal and inviting the parents to the school in the more serious cases. Such proposals constitute important interventions, but are limited to immediate reactions, institutionally little articulated and extraneous to consistent reflections on the participation of the family and school in the production and confrontation of bullying. These proposals allow monitoring and intervention in situations in which the violence has already been consummated, but they do not

develop school strategies and programs to prevent it over the long term.

The Art teachers from school C and the Portuguese teacher from school B highlighted important aspects such as the automatic acceptance of socially established values. The Art teacher observed that “hair, eyes, teeth etc.; everything that is different contributes to being a victim”. This takes us to the relationship between the socially valued standards and the level of demanded adjustment, indicating the fact that those less adjusted to such models and standards are normally those who become victims. The Portuguese teacher confirmed this understanding because she highlighted that “the soap operas and advertisements show beautiful and successful people” and, then, the students “start having this standard and attack or exclude whoever has frizzy hair, whoever is fat etc.” Such considerations acknowledge the relationship between the social dimension and the school day-to-day, thereby revealing the non-randomness of the positions of aggressor and victim, but interpreting it mechanically. Both answers agreed in relation to how the students face bullying; a significative portion of them face it as a joke: “[the students] curse each other, attack each other. They do not go away; they think it is funny”. In spite of associating the verbal aggressions and the recurrent humiliating jokes to the standardization, an important element for discussion on how much the stereotypy may stimulate and occult bullying, they did not articulate the social and individual dimensions; ignoring the contradictions of instrumental rationality subjacent to the standardization, which bases the regressive individual behaviors.

We noticed, in the answers from the Portuguese, Art and Physical Education 1 teachers from school D, the perceptions very similar in relation to the causes of bullying; they referred to a supposed common emotional need to the students involved in this form of violence, and emphasized the fragility of the attacking youths’ moral values, which were attributed to family, according to what the Portuguese and Physical Education teachers said, respectively. “As the family does not play its role, the school has to educate”; and “the school is a getaway; the students try to ‘show up’ here, because they cannot do it at home”. According to what they argued, the improper formation of values in the family environment reaches the school and expresses itself in interpersonal conflicts. In addition to the emphasis to violence originating from the family, they mentioned the propagation of tension present in the community. The Portuguese teacher exemplifies this perspective well: “Many students live in a drug trafficking zone; they have already witnessed slaughters and lynching, and bring this violence from home to the school”.

In addition, they correctly highlighted the repetition, within the school, of violence coming from the community or other spheres of social life; however, the link between school and society was not analyzed. The underlying relationship in the determination identified

by them assumed a mechanical characteristic, not greatly clarifying the contradictory movements of social life; thus, the society, instead of social totality, was taken as static data of the private life of the innumerable unfortunates who have to infinitely repeat the misfortunes of his/her social class: the social fact is summoned to legitimate, as positive data, the accountability of the individual who has already been weakened by the social process.

Something similar was observed in the considerations of the Physical Education teacher from school E. He characterized bullying as repetition of aggressions experienced in the past. According to his scheme – “He/she grows and becomes a teaser” –, the aggressor automatically reproduces the violence suffered, replicating it upon whom he has elected as victim. Such considerations acknowledge that violence originates in social relationships; however, they restrict it to a mechanical determination and slip back into the blind affirmation that violence generates violence, protecting the social and educational institutions that, covered by the instrumental rationality, are not greatly perceived as violence propagators; even if they are propelling forces of coldness, competitiveness and of the many forms of subjugation to the most fragile. The reference to violence suffered within the family and other social scopes of social life during the cultural formation process was not articulated with the school institution or with the social totality. The school appeared detached from the social whole, whether for having been neglected as an institution for cultural formation, supplied with great power of influence on youths during their cultural formation, or for having been treated as a neutral space, protected from the interference of the social contradictions; even if it is evident that it is within this that the dynamics of society are reproduced and assimilated as proper forms of social life. The school institution’s regression to its adaptive function favors the internalization of socially destructive values, such as savage competitiveness, disproportionate coldness, and apathetic reification of the other.

These teachers’ considerations represent interesting forms of confrontation to bullying. Their potentiality should be recognized in the expressed need to establish mediations between youths, their families and the school, even if such institutions are not treated as parts of the social totality. Nevertheless, in spite of having tried long term, more elaborated confrontation proposals, which implicated in teamwork and in transmission of values and principles, they remained, mainly, in emergency interventions, with little attention given to the factors that are not even perceived as being related to bullying, thus, are neglected as part of its causes. Even with notorious contribution, such indications seem to be insufficient to make it possible for the students to express their distress and fears and elaborate their conflicts without appealing to violence.

Answers that did not present traces of consciousness of construction and confrontation to bullying

Lastly, three teachers’ answers showed a low level of consciousness, both in terms of the causes of bullying and the proposals to reduce it. Although this type of positioning has been infrequent, its incidence among professionals responsible for the formation of conscience configures a drastic situation of alienation and resignation before the intensification of violence. The weak consciousness in relation to the causes and confrontation to bullying disqualifies the pedagogic intervention to overcome it.

The answers of the teachers from this category revealed uncritical positioning in relation to bullying. They showed unawareness of its violent character and possibly its social and historic determinations. In our view, such a level of alienation is characterized as a stereotype vision of the cultural formation process. The Physical Education teacher from school C, for instance, indicated that bullying is something “natural in interpersonal relationships”, only in evidence due to an “overvaluation of the phenomenon”. When referring to situations of bullying as something natural to interpersonal relations, she trivializes violence. She dispenses with the need to reflect on its causes and thought towards actions for to reduce it. It seems to us that the alienation manifested by teachers in relation to the violence that occurs in school is at the same level of the indifference formerly mobilized by Fascism (Adorno, 1967/2000c).

The Physical Education teacher II from school D, without presenting any considerations on the social contradictions or on the accented economic inequality verified in Brazil, suggested that bullying would be characterized by a persecution of the rich by the poor. “The poor thinks that it has right to steal from the rich”. This inadvertent distortion of social determinations reinforces the impoverished representation of the class struggle as blind immediacy, which sees the conflict as immediate derivations of individual interest, abstracted from the social dynamic, and that concedes alleged neutrality to the mediator institutions, separating them from the objective social forces. Besides, the perception that she has of the teachers was also presented as distorted: radically denying the self-consciousness, she characterized them as external agents to the process of school violence; alienated specialists of the institution and society in which they are inserted, but, even so, qualified as eminent “conflict administrators”. Equally rigid, but inverse, the Physical Education teacher from school B suggested that “society is guilty for everything”. The reference to society as an homogeneous totality, which works regardless of the action of the individuals that compound it, could evoke the unveiling of the mechanisms of social determination; however, for denying the subject, maintains a notion of society that defines all scopes of life abstractly; it supplants any intention of consciousness and, mainly, of

self-consciousness, so needed by teachers. Both answers sketch perceptions that bullying is a form of violence, but they refer to their supposed determinants with rigidity, provoking a clear neutralization of the actions of the teachers. Resigned before a reality in which they did not recognize themselves, they remain more and more distant from the possibility of unveiling the connections between social totality, the institutions that regulate the everyday life and mediate social life and the psychosocial reactions of the individuals and groups that play the main role in situations of bullying. When they did not admit that bullying occurs in socially determined relationships, reproduced by the individuals in the organizations and institutions in which they coexist, their explanations give in to the ideologies, contrary to the critical consciousness.

In addition, some of the answers from this category consisted in blaming the victims for the violence that they suffer. The Physical Education teacher from school C indicated that if many students commonly attack the “weak” and the “new” within the school, the latter should get in with a group or hit back when provoked. Contradictorily, at the same time she considered the attacking students should treat the new colleagues as friends, insisted in the criticism to the victims, indicating that frequently they come to the school “fancying themselves” and, then, stimulate violence. By emphasizing that some students “lie back and take a beating at school”, the teacher from school B also used this reductionist explicative mechanism.

In relation to the proposals of reducing bullying, the Physical Education teacher from school C argued that nothing should be done, that it would be better to “let it go”, because emphasizing conflicts of this kind would only aggravate the situation. In another moment of the interview, she admitted that some work should be done, but only with the victim. In fact, it is the accountability of the victim that arises; as if the fragility that seems to seduce the aggressor for the exercise of violence (Horkheimer e Adorno, 1947/1985) would not be an intervention of domination that impels the aggressor to persecute everything that reminds him/her of his/her own fragility. In turn, the Physical Education teachers from school D and B gave proposals characterized by disciplinary severity: lectures with “policeman, firefighters, a tutelary council, so that they could explain life as a citizen; and lectures for the parents” or “more punishment”. Coherently with the alleged neutrality attributed to the school in relation to the causes of bullying, they also showed themselves unaware regarding the need for its confrontation: in the lectures mentioned, the position of the viewer stands out, because it replaces the educative intervention by training based on the rigidity of the law, on the recourse to institutions that are traditionally characterized for using the grammar of power. In face of this, it is worth reminding ourselves of Adorno's criticism (1967/2000c) to education based on severity: “He who is severe with himself acquires the right to be severe with others also” (p. 128). Both the victims and the aggressors seem to represent the accomplishment

of the macabre efficiency of an education that allows the cultivation of severity and is silent before the brutality that falls upon the most fragile; and that, even envisioning forms of resistance to violence that destroys the educative experience or punishment to those that exercise it, does it indifferently, through the valuation of the formal compliance with the law.

Final considerations

The analysis of the interviews allows us to understand the relationship between the conceptions of the teachers regarding the constellation of factors implicated in the construction of bullying and the consistence of the proposals elaborated by them or with which they agree to use in its confrontation. We confirmed the hypothesis that an enlightened consciousness, which is substantiated by the teachers' considerations on the processes of bullying construction and reduction and, for this reason, correspondent to an ample and objective perception of the constellation of factors related to the development of this form of violence, would provide substantiality to the analysis of the phenomenon, assuring, with that, consistence to the proposals to its confrontation and subsequent reduction; in a way to allow more elaborated considerations and with critical potential regarding the entanglement between individual, institutional and social dimensions, and, mainly, to assure a critical consciousness of the importance and limits of the actions of confrontation of a phenomenon that is based on objectively established social tendencies: bullying is the expression of a contradictory and highly hierarchic society, which demands that people adapt themselves to cold and intensely competitive relationships, and it shall only be effectively overcome through the radical transformation of the objective conditions that currently engender it.

This confirmation appeared in first and third categories. In the first category, there was an ample vision of the constellation of determinant factors of bullying and proposals that admitted the need to confront it considering this complexity and without neglecting the difficulties to assure its reduction. In the third category, there was an inverse reasoning: for presenting an alienated position, which did not take into account the various factors connected to its causes nor did it realize the inevitable participation of the school and teachers in the processes that contribute towards its occurrence, characterized a lack of self-consciousness, impoverished and partial comprehension, as well as little interest and low participation in actions related to its confrontation. In some cases, bullying has not even been recognized as something serious that needs to be tackled.

Besides these two antinomic tendencies, it is necessary to reflect on the second category, which was composed of teachers who had not shown a consciousness of the causes of bullying, but that had engaged in its confrontation. Their answers delineated an initially

paradoxical situation: how is it possible for there to be an engagement or allusion to structured proposals of confronting bullying without consistent understanding of the factors that produce or favor it?

According to what we understood, the element of consciousness expressed in the teachers' considerations on the causes of bullying and what would be necessary to reduce it stand out in relation to other types of motivation for action, such as the ones that historically founded unthinking forms of activism. Such motivations, identified in the actions of most of interviewees remind us of the pseudo activity criticized by Adorno (1969/1995a) regarding the blind activism that put itself as a substitute for critical consciousness in political manifestations delighted by the thirst of social transformation, but contrary to the theoretical reflection. Whether moral motivations, which address the need to adjust towards the politically correct, or motivations that aim at the alignment with the pressure of institutional nature, imposed as external and non-reflected commitment (Adorno, 1967/2000c) or, still, those that assure the reproduction of what has been conventionally established by certain groups or sectors of social life, all dispense with the development of a critical consciousness that allows the teachers to act as autonomous subjects, positioning themselves against the propagation of forms of brutality that reproduce the barbarism inaugurated by *Auschwitz*.

The second category stood out for being the most numerous and for presenting the most diverse answers. What allowed us to group them was the restricted vision regarding the determinant factors of bullying. We observed that the lack of considerations that showed consciousness was related to proposals of confrontation that reduce them to causal little articulated relationships with the social context and with the institutional dimension. Some of them expressed alignment with the school policy; they reproduced it without reflecting, in consonance with the set of ideas of opposition to violence. One may inquire if and to what extent this type of intuitive positioning contributes effectively to reduce bullying. In *A filosofia e os professores*, Adorno (1962/2000a) described the same number of candidates to the superior education teacher position, interviewed by him, knew to answer promptly to the questions made, although they were not able to relate such contents to theoretical implications or historic contexts; they could not reflect on them. This assertion unveils the limits of the instrumentation of knowledge, which, according to him, corrodes precisely what is necessary to be spontaneously reflected upon.

The analogy with the situation criticized by Adorno allows us to indicate the similarity to the adhesion to policies for confronting bullying, lack of consciousness of the factors that produce it, and with the use of a “standard response” poor in reflection that contributes little so that one can resist it. It is not proper to neglect the importance of the positioning enunciated by the teachers from the second category, because they repudiated school violence, and it is not irrelevant in a violent society. The adhesion or, simply, the reference to programs to confront bullying may compose and strengthen a cultural environment contrary to the barbarism, which, through proper interventions, may favor consciousness rising. Intervention in cases of violence, even in the contradictions here emphasized, is fundamental and may, if associated with a reflection process, rise to the conceptual plan. In this sense, it is up to the theory – thus, also to those that have already developed the critical consciousness and to the ones who have solid knowledge of bullying – to indicate the limits of blind interventions, which could validate superficial attitudes or induce conformism, and emphasize the potentiality present in the repudiation to violence, because such indisposition could favor the critical attitude necessary to formation. Thus, one could indicate how profitable the spaces that promote discussion can be, theoretical appropriation and reflection to the education professionals.

It is worth mentioning that some teachers who were asked about the causes of bullying revealed that had never thought about the subject. In this sense, the research represented an awakening in terms of their reflection. Therefore, if we strengthen spaces for reflection, we would strengthen the resistance to impulses originated by the society that maintains violence as a regulator of social relationships. If, in addition to it, through an enlightened consciousness, we, as teachers, assumed the responsibility for education against the barbarism, our self-awareness would become part of the awareness of youths being educated under our influence, so that this consciousness then propagated could potentize the autonomy necessary to reduce bullying. In the face of this, the cultural formation of teachers stands out as one of the central elements to combat barbarism. When recognizing the importance of the dimension of the consciousness and when articulating it with the education of teachers, including consistent proposals of continuing formation, the public policies shall delineate more effective positioning of reducing bullying, maintaining, with that, the hope that the school, when it becomes aware that it also propagates the barbarism from itself, assumes the objective of unbarbarizing humanity.

Limites da consciência de professores a respeito dos processos de produção e redução do bullying

Resumo: Orientados pela Teoria Crítica da Sociedade, analisamos o conteúdo de entrevistas de 17 professores de cinco escolas públicas paulistanas acerca do que produz o *bullying* e do que deve ser feito para reduzi-lo. Identificamos três categorias de respostas: as que expressam consciência crítica a respeito de sua produção e redução; as que denotam engajamento em relação

a seu combate, mas consciência restrita a respeito de suas causas; e as que apresentam consciência restrita em ambos os casos. Como a consciência fragilizada se destacou na maioria dos casos, concluímos que ampliar ações destinadas à formação conceitual a fortaleceria junto a profissionais que se propõem a enfrentar esse tipo de violência, quer seja por meio da intervenção direta, do desenvolvimento de pesquisas ou da proposição de políticas públicas.

Palavras-chave: Teoria Crítica, *bullying*, consciência, professores, escola.

Limites de la conscience de professeurs au sujet des processus de production et de réduction du bullying

Résumé: Sous l'orientation de la Théorie Critique de la Société, on a analysé le contenu d'entretiens avec 17 professeurs de cinq écoles publiques de la ville de São Paulo au sujet de ce qui produit le bullying et de ce qui doit être fait pour le réduire. On a identifié trois catégories de réponses : des réponses qui expriment une conscience critique à l'égard de sa production et de sa réduction ; des réponses qui témoignent un engagement pour le combat contre le bullying, mais une conscience restreinte en ce qui concerne ses causes ; et, finalement, des réponses qui présentent une conscience restreinte sous les deux rapports. Comme la conscience fragilisée a ressorti dans la plupart des cas, on a conclu que l'amplification des actions destinées à la formation conceptuelle la fortifierait avec les professionnels qui se proposent d'affronter ce type de violence, soit par l'intervention directe, soit par le développement de recherches, soit par la proposition de politiques publiques.

Mots-clés: theorie critique, *bullying*, conscience, professeurs, école.

Límites de la conciencia de los profesores acerca de los procesos de producción y reducción del bullying

Resumen: Orientados por la Teoría Crítica de la Sociedad, analizamos el contenido de entrevistas con 17 profesores de cinco escuelas públicas de São Paulo acerca de lo que produce y lo que se debe hacer para reducir el bullying. Identificamos tres categorías de respuestas: que expresan conciencia crítica sobre su producción y reducción; que denotan la participación en relación a su combate, pero limitada conciencia acerca de sus causas; y que demonstam conciencia restricta en ambos los casos. Una vez que la conciencia debilitada se destacó en la mayoría de los casos, llegamos a la conclusión que ampliar las acciones destinadas a la formación conceptual reforzaría junto a los profesionales que tengan la intención de hacer frente a este tipo de violencia, sea a través de la intervención directa, del desarrollo de las pesquisas o proposición de políticas públicas.

Palabras clave: teoría crítica, *bullying*, conciencia, profesores, escuela.

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